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ABSTRACT

Tested were two elaborations of research design which were implemented to explain inconsistent findings concerning levels of father involvement in child rearing when the mother is employed. The first elaboration was to study separate dimensions of fathering participation, rather than treating it as a unitary factor. The second elaboration was to use maternal employment status to classify one-earner and two-earner families, rather than to treat maternal employment as an independent variable. Subjects in this study were 70 two-parent non-Black families, each having a 6-year-old child and a father who was employed full-time. Findings indicated that father involvement in child rearing had stronger correlates in the two-earner sample than in the one-earner sample, supporting the conclusion that one-earner and two-earner families should be treated as separate populations within which different factors may influence paternal involvement. In addition, father involvement in routine child care and in play with the child had different correlates. Generally, study results showed that weaker and less accurate findings would have resulted from using an overall measure of paternal child rearing participation and an analysis strategy that combined both family types. (RH)

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FATHER INVOLVEMENT WITH SIX YEAR OLDS: CORRELATES DIFFER BY MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND AREA OF CHILDREARING INVOLVEMENT

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Introduction

Do fathers participate more in childrearing when their wives are employed? Some studies suggest this link, but others have failed to find an association. Zaslow et al. (1985) suggest that methodology --observational vs. survey-- may explain the discrepancy. But even the studies using just survey methods paint a mixed picture. Time-use methods, meanwhile, have typically found little or no differences in the childrearing participation of fathers from 1-earner and 2-earner families (Pleck, 1983).

The current paper tests two elaborations which may help explain the inconsistent findings. First, research has often treated "father involvement with child' globally, as a unitary dimension. Recent work has shown that separate dimensions of father involvement exist, in particular involvement in routine childcare and in playing with the child (Riley, 1985).

Second, we have usually treated maternal employment as a cause. It may be more accurate to treat it as a classificatory factor that defines two ecologically distinct populations of two-parent households: those with one earner versus those with two. Conceived thus, maternal employment may have no direct effect on paternal childrearing involvement, but may nonetheless define subgroups within which different situational demands and opportunities affect the father's role.

The usefulness of these two elaborations is demonstrated by the results of this study.

Sample

The sample was drawn from the database of a larger study, the Comparative Ecology of Human Development Project at Cornell University. The sample included 70 non-Black fathers of six-year- olds. Each father was employed at least 30 hours per week, and living with the child in a two-parent household. They were selected by door-to-door recruitment of a cross-section of neighborhoods in Syracuse, New York. Forty-six percent of the fathers contacted agreed to participate fully in the study. Non-participation was associated with living in an ethnic neighborhood, having a larger family, and less education. Selected characteristics of the sample:

	Mean	S.D	Range
Father's Age	36.4	5.0	26 -51
Father's Education	13.8	3.0	6 -21
Father's Income (1981)	23K	10K	2.4K -60K
Father's paid work hours/wk	45.2	8.4	30 -77
Mother's paid work hours/wk	16.2	16.6	0 -50

Fifty-three percent of the mothers were employed outside the home for 10 hours or more per week. (This was the criteria for "maternal employment"). Thirty percent of the fathers had blue collar occupations, and the remainder were white collar or professional. Forty-six percent of the fathers had a boy six-year- old, and 54% a girl.

Most recent studies of paternal childrearing involvement have studied fathers of infants, or have used samples of convenience or self-selected samples of highly involved fathers. This study, in contrast, used a randomly selected community sample of fathers of six-year olds.

Measures

Data were collected separately from the mothers and fathers during interviews in the home. To measure father involvement, each parent was asked "Who usually does each chore listed here?" The same list of chores was presented to each parent. Responses were coded as follows:

1 = Not done by the father.
2 = Father helps out.
3 = Done by the father and mother equally.
4 = Usually done by the father.

Mother and father reports showed high agreement, and were combined into scales (Riley, 1985).

Father Involvement in Routine Childcare
8 items (4 items x 2 parent estimates each)
Coefficient alpha = .72

1. Dressing and undressing children.
2. Taking care of sick children.
3. Putting children to bed.
4. Washing and bathing children.

Father Involvement in Play with the Child
6 items (3 items x 2 parent estimates each)
Coefficient alpha = .66

1. Playing with children indoors.
2. Playing with children outdoors.
3. Taking children on outings.

Father's Work Interference
6 items, with responses indicating agree-disagreement on a 7 point Likert scale. Rspondent was mother.
Coefficient alpha = .66

1. My husband's working hours interfere with our family life.
2. I would rather that my husband would spend less time working and more time with our family.
3. When my husband gets home from work, he does not have the energy to be a good parent.
4. My husband's job helps him to have a better relationship with our child (reverse coded).
5. My husband's family life interferes with his being able to do a good job at work.
6. If something comes up at home, my husband can make arrangements to take time off, go in late, or leave early (reverse coded).

Correlations

n = 70

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Father Involvement - Childcare	-					
2. Father Involvement - Play	.30*	-				
3. Mother Paid Work Hours	-.06	.09	-			
4. Father Paid Work Hours	.01	-.15	.05	-		
5. Father Work Interference	-.27*	-.42**	.10	.05	-	
6. Father Education	.42**	.12	-.09	.09	-.28*	-
Mean	16.2	16.5	16.4	45.2	26.9	13.8
S.D.	3.9	3.1	16.6	8.4	7.2	3.0
Minimum	9	7	0	30	15	7
Maximum	24	21	50	77	42	22

Note: * $p < .05$
** $p < .001$

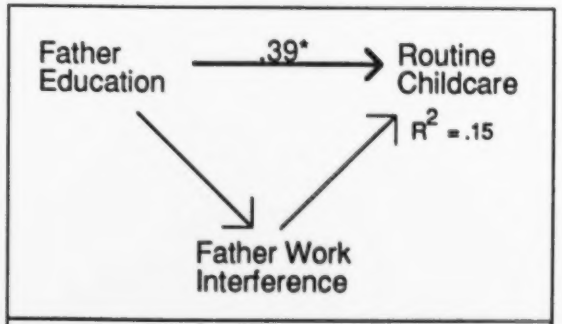
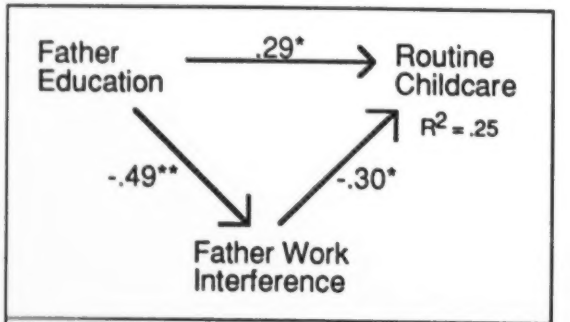
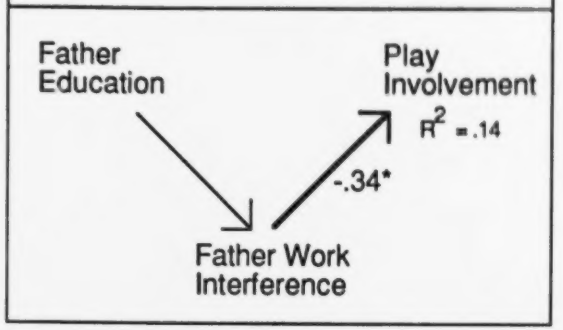
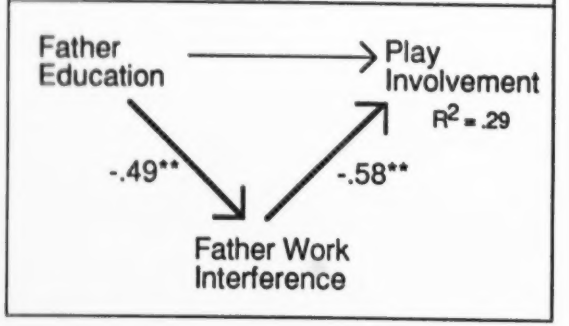
Do fathers perform a larger share of childrearing tasks when their wives work more hours outside the home?

No. In the overall sample, neither measure of father involvment (columns 1 and 2) was related to either the mother's or father's number of employment hours.

The two measures of father involvement were positively related to the father's educational level, and negatively related to a measure of work interference. "Work interference" tapped qualitative aspects of his job, for example whether or not his work hours were flexible for family needs (see definition in "Measures.")

The next question: Will these two correlates (education and work interference) show the same pattern of relationship in 1-earner and 2-earner subgroups that they do here in the overall sample?

Family Type

Type of Father Involvement	1 - Earner n = 33	2 - Earner N = 37
Father's Share of Routine Childcare		
Father's Share of Play With The Child		

All Path Coefficients Greater Than .20 Are Shown

Do the correlates of father involvement differ by the type of family and type of involvement?

Yes. Four regressions were calculated, using two measures of father involvement in two subgroups. Each regression had the same two predictors: father educational level and work interference. The results are displayed in the form of path models.

Contrasting the family types (1-earner vs. 2-earner)

Stronger relationships were found in the 2-earner sample. For example, work interference and educational level together predicted 29% of the variance in father-child play in the 2-earner families, but only 14% in the 1-earner families.

Contrasting the types of father involvement

Education was independently related to a greater role in routine childcare, but unrelated to the father's play participation.

Combined Contrast

For fathers from 1-earner families, work interference bore no relationship with fathers' involvement in routine childcare (upper left cell of the chart: standardized beta (not shown) = -.04, n.s.). The association of work interference with father involvement was strongest in the other family type (2-earner) and the otehr area of involvement (play). Here, in the lower right cell of the chart, the standardized beta was -.58 ($p < .01$).

The moderate-sized correlations in the total sample disguised the fact that work interference was a much stronger predictor of fathering in some subgroups, and a near-zero predictor in others.

Conclusions

1. In research on father involvement in childrearing, it may prove crucial to treat 1-earner and 2-earner families as separate populations. Empirically, they have different correlates. Theoretically, different causal processes may operate for these two groups.

Note that statistically controlling for maternal work status will not help. The issue is not uncontrolled variance, but rather non-homogeneity of variance accross subgroups. (In the current sample, maternal employment is not correlated with the father's involvement anyway.)

2. Measures of individuals' work roles appear less important than the family work pattern. For example, the father's work interference was related to less childrearing involvement if his wife was employed, much more so than if she wasn't.

This particular finding suggests an interesting interpretation: that work interference and the 2-earner family type represent two kinds of family inflexibility. When operating together, they produce strong effects that could not be predicted by calculating their individual correlates. A multiply-stressed system often produces the strongest predictors.

3. The different areas of father involvement need to be distinguished. Childcare participation and play participation had different predictors.

Note that the father's involvement was here measured relative to the mother's, rather than as a behavioral frequency or quantity of time. Attention needs to be paid to both the areas of involvement and the units of analysis, if we are to clearly define "father involvement in childrearing."

4. In general, an overall measure of involvement and an analysis that combined both family types would have resulted in weaker and less accurate results.

5. The results of this paper are highly consistent with those of an unpublished report by Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, and McHale (in press). In a study of 43 parents of infants and toddlers, two types of father involvement (childcare and leisure with the child) were contrasted in 1-earner and 2-earner families. As in the present study, they found different correlates by maternal employment status and area of childrearing involvement.

A recent report by Barnett and Baruch (1987), of a study of 160 families of kindergarten and fourth grade children, also supported the general conclusions of this article. The measures of father involvement were quite different than in the present study (i.e. reports of amount of interaction time), but once again predictors of father involvement were different in 1-earner and 2-earner families.

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